

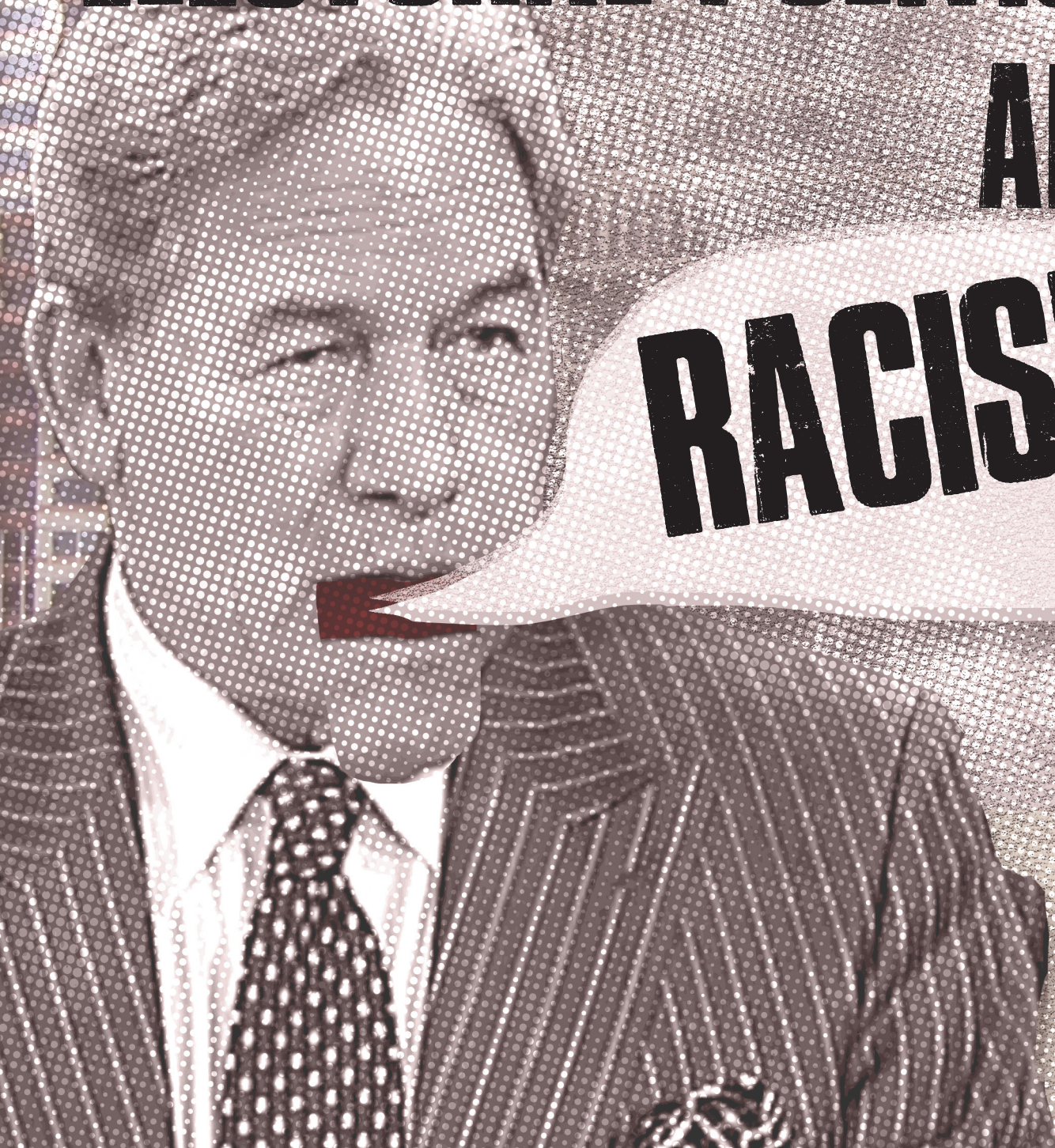
Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

ELECTORAL POLITICS

AND

RACISM



Editorial

In the last two years, racist populism has gained new ground in electoral politics. Accordingly, the articles collected in this issue struggle with questions of electoral nationalism, racial scapegoating, and self-determination. The issue collates three original articles, and three articles reprinted from international sources.

We open with two articles focused on **Aotearoa/New Zealand**; firstly, on the way that migrant-bashing focuses on brown workers while letting Pākehā off the hook, and secondly a retrospective on the recent General Election focusing on New Zealand First. On international matters, Daphne Lawless considers the impact of the Brexit vote on the Labour Party (**United Kingdom**).

Moving into reprints, a widely circulated article by Ta-Nehisi Coates (originally printed in The Nation) clarifies the racialised nature of Trump support (**USA**).

Finally, two articles on self-determination movements in the Pacific and Europe contrast with the right-wing nationalism covered in previous pages. An article on **New Caledonia**'s recent election, and upcoming independence referendum, explains how independence is mainly supported by the indigenous Kanak people (reprinted from SBS Australia). In a more prominent European case, an article on **Catalonia**'s independence referendum explains the political background of the independence movement (reprinted from globaljustice.org.uk). In contrast to nationalist movements in Britain and the USA, the self-determination movement in Catalonia seeks progressive reforms (and seeks to remain in the EU). As anti-capitalist independentist Lluç Salellas highlights:

'The last fifteen laws we have passed in the Catalan parliament have been banned by the Spanish state. But these are not independentist laws — many of them are social laws: for example, a law about sanctuary for those fleeing persecution, a law banning energy companies from turning off people's electricity, and a law for a higher minimum wage.'

We hope these articles help our readers think and act in tumultuous times.

Editorial by Ani White, coordinating editor of this issue.

CONTENTS

4

**Pākehā Invisibility:
Why does 'migrant' mean 'brown'?**

| Ani White and Kassie Hartendorp

7

**Racial populism and the 2017
New Zealand General Election** | Ani White

10

**Fightback's election activity:
Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign**

12

**Winning with Conservative Leftism:
Jeremy Corbyn and Brexit** | Daphne Lawless

20

The First White President | Ta-Nehisi Coates, reprinted from The Atlantic.

32

New Caledonia counts down to Independence vote | Stefan Armbruster,
republished from SBS (Australia).

34

Five things to know about the Independence movement in Catalonia
| James O'Nions, originally printed by globaljustice.org.uk

AOTEAROA/ NEW ZEALAND

Pākehā Invisibility: Why does 'migrant' mean 'brown'?

By Ani White and Kassie Hartendorp

Internationally, many white immigrants to non-white countries are not termed immigrants, they are termed 'expats.' Immigrant means brown, expat means white.

A similar dynamic plays out in Aotearoa. Pākehā immigrants do not describe themselves as immigrants. Many even object to the term Pākehā; we are simply "New Zealanders."

Some may object that their family has been here for generations, but the same standard does not apply to brown immigrants. Asian people whose families have lived here for generations are assumed to be new migrants, not "New Zealanders." At a candidates' meeting I recently attended, a white woman asked an Asian candidate a question along the lines of "if you don't like this country why did you come here?" She had no awareness of his family history; for all she knew, he was a third-generation migrant (as it happens, he arrived as a child, so didn't have much choice in the matter). But his brown face marked him as a migrant, a 'foreigner.'

Even though Europeans and Asians in New Zealand are both immigrants, Europeans are naturalised as part of 'New Zealand' and non-white migrants are cast as 'outsiders.'

The New Zealand where Europeans are naturalised as the dominant population, and inheritors

of land and resources, relies on a story that erases colonial history. Those who strongly defend the identity of 'New Zealander'; very rarely acknowledge that before this region became New Zealand, it was Aotearoa. It was (and is) Te Ika-a-Māui and Te Waipounamu. It was (and is) a Pacific Island in Te Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa before it became a British colony. Many Pākehā prefer to forget this history.

The colonial state of New Zealand, set up by Pākehā immigrants, gets to determine who can come into this country. Indigenous approaches of *manaakitanga* (values of welcoming and hospitality) were violated, replaced with a bureaucratic edifice which categorises and profiles people hoping to cross borders. Institutions enabled by mass European immigration presume to dictate who can come next.

Ironically, a recent survey¹ indicated that whereas only 28% of New Zealand citizens strongly agreed with the statement "People who want to live here should have to declare their commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi / Te Tiriti o Waitangi", 40% per cent of recent migrants agreed (close to the 47% of Māori who agreed). The irony is underlined when 'New Zealanders' act offended at the thought of migrants 'invading our country' when many of their forebears actually invaded, at the mass detriment of Māori.

In certain respects, European migrants to Aotearoa have something in common with new Asia-Pacific migrants. We came here seeking a better life, with 19th century colonists escaping dire economic conditions. However, Asian migrants are not stealing land at gunpoint, as Pākehā did in the 19th century. Rather, they work in banks, cafes, on dairy farms, cleaning office buildings, their sweat oiling the nation's economic growth, paid back in low wages and abuse. Even higher-paid, 'high-skilled' white collar migrants, supposedly more valuable than 'low-skilled' workers, still cop abuse.

Scapegoating of Asian migrants goes back to early colonisation. Chinese migrants during the Gold Rush were forced to pay special taxes, and chased out of places like Wellington. In the early 20th Century, the NZ Labour Party flirted with a 'White New Zealand' policy to match Australia's 'White Australia' policy. More recently in 2014, Labour's Phil Twyford controversially highlighted those with 'Chinese surnames' purchasing property. For all he knew, these people were long-term residents.

Yellow Peril scares are therefore deeply ingrained in New Zealand society. Noticeably, while many worry about Chinese investors buying up land, British and Americans who buy up land go largely unnoticed. International investors are also equated with migrant workers, as with the case of Twyford's 'Chinese surnames', which again could either have been investors or long-term residents.

Rather than projecting all New Zealand's problems onto brown faces, perhaps Pākehā could reflect on the real sources of New Zealand's problems. Migrant workers are not causing the housing crisis, or underinvestment in sustainable infrastructure. Labour is proposing to cut students and 'low-skilled' workers, not people likely to buy houses or clog up motorways. In fact, middle-class Pākehā are far more likely to buy property or use motorways.

In a recent controversy, National Party MP Paul Goldsmith implied that the slumlord problem was

primarily an Indian problem. Yet about 80 MPs in parliament own more than one property. As a Pākehā MP in his 40s, Paul Goldsmith is a far likelier face for slumlord profiteering than the young Indian student he spoke to. As Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign spokesperson Gayaal Iddamalgoda said in the Herald article² on the topic,

"If we're serious about addressing the [housing] problem, we need to understand it's a problem caused by slumlords and other profiteers, regardless of their surnames or the colour of their skin."

Jacinda Ardern has recently softened Labour's rhetoric about migrants, but maintained the policy of cutting 10s of 1000s of migrants. In that sense she is simply spinning a policy that was introduced by Little as a xenophobic populist tactic. If she's really worried about migrant exploitation, she should call for the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme to be radically reformed, or the international tertiary sector to be vetted for quality, rather than restricting free movement. It's easier to pity the brown dairy worker than to confront the Pākehā farm owner who benefits from the exploitative RSE scheme.

Even Pākehā without the structural power of a politician, or a capitalist, often buy into these narratives. Facebook comment threads regularly complain of 'real New Zealanders' being shafted by 'mass immigration.' But if working class Pākehā are being shafted, they are being shafted by the powerful, not by migrants.

Wages are driven down because employers prioritise their bottom-line, treating social impacts as 'externalities.' Migrant workers do not want shitty wages. If Pākehā worked together with new migrants - for example in the Living Wage Campaign, which is supported by many migrant workers, and has won several victories - they could improve conditions for all workers, rather than competing in a race to the bottom.

For Pākehā to make things better, we need to get

over our investment in defending 'Fortress New Zealand'. In moments where anti-migrant rhetoric is high, we have the option to reflect on how we came to be in Te Moana-Nui- a-Kiwa ourselves. We need to recognise our status as coming from a history of immigration on this land,

acknowledge who came before us, and find solidarity with those who want the same things as we do - housing security, living wages, the right to flourish and contribute to Aotearoa.

¹ thespinoff.co.nz/society/12-06-2017/as-we-gear-up-for-an-election-a-new-poll-reveals-nz-views-on-immigration/

² www.newshub.co.nz/home/election/2017/08/national-s-paul-goldsmith-accused-of-blaming-indians-for-housing-crisis.html



AOTEAROA/ NEW ZEALAND

Racial populism and the 2017 New Zealand General Election

By Ani White

This article was first published on October 20th, the day after the new government was announced.

It's understandable that many leftists are celebrating. After 9 years of Tory brutality, a change of government can feel like a breath of fresh air. However, the morning after the celebrations, we must take stock and critically evaluate the make-up of the next government, so we know what battles await us in the coming years. Laurie Penny described voting as choosing which enemies you prefer – this is a valid tactic, so long as we know our enemies.

It's unfortunate that the next Labour government will feature Winston Peters in such a prominent role. Anecdotally, some claim that Winston's anti-immigrant scapegoating is a thing of the past. However, simply searching Winston Peters' twitter page for the keyword 'immigration' reveals a long series of negative tweets (see picture). When the New Zealand Herald published an article¹ saying that Asian immigration numbers have been overstated, Peters responded² by pointing out the Asian heritage of the journalists. Reducing immigration was a bottom line in his post-election negotiations. Perhaps Peters' attacks on migrants are no longer noticed because they are so predictable.

Others who admit Peters' racism argue that compromise is necessary for the parliamentary 'left', with Winston holding the cards. It would be easier to sympathise with this dilemma if anti-migrant populism wasn't already a common ground between Labour and New Zealand First. Compromise is more of a genuine dilemma for the Greens. The party dropped James Shaw's 1% immigration cap policy after criticism from the membership, had the best refugee policy of any party, introduced the first MP of refugee background to parliament, and generally stood on the most progressive platform of any parliamentary party. For those of us who voted Green in the hope that they would offer a more progressive coalition partner than New Zealand First, this coalition deal is something of a Pyrrhic victory.

Peters is a racial populist, both his in long-standing tendency to blame immigrants for all social problems and his opposition to 'special rights' for Māori (although thankfully, his opposition to Māori seats has not been adopted). Although certain elements of New Zealand First policy can be mistaken for left-wing – particularly the economic nationalism – both his economic and social policy

seek to wind back the clock 50 years. Coming originally from National, Peters essentially advocates something like the National Party of the 1960s-1980s, during the heyday of both social democracy and conservative assimilationism. This is far from a forward-thinking programme for liberation today.

Ironically rural Māori are a significant section of Winston's voter base. This reflects an international trend where isolated rural regions, with few migrants, tend to be more anti-migrant. Additionally, many Māori likely support his economic policies. Conversely, support in the Māori seats dropped from 12-14% in 2014 to 7-9% in 2017, likely due to Winston campaigning against Māori seats.

Racial populism often adopts egalitarian rhetoric. The coupling of racism with economic populism is in some ways even more insidious than neoliberalism, as Indian Marxist Jairus Banaji explained in a commentary on India's racist 'communalist' movement:

Neo-liberalism disarms the working class economically, destroying its cohesion in an industrial, economic sense. Racism, communalism and nationalism... do the same in more insidious ways, destroying the possibility of the working class ever acquiring a sense of its own solidarity and of what it really is.

Racial populism diverts attention from the capitalist class who control resources, towards racialised targets.

A recent Spinoff article³ on New Zealand First's national conference noted that much of the membership consider themselves anti-neoliberal, not consciously racist. Bluntly, those who support New Zealand First for economic rather than social reasons are being led down a dangerous blind alley. A Jacobin⁴ article by the same author asserted that a surge for New Zealand First would be a "significant realignment." However, New Zealand First's support has dropped since reaching up to 18% in the 1990s, so their popularity is nothing new.

The party's determining role in New Zealand politics is less a sign of the times than a continuation of Winston Peters' long-standing manipulation of MMP, with a similar scenario playing out as far back as 1996 (where the formation of the government took seven weeks). Whereas the similar-sized Greens clearly orientate themselves towards Labour, Peters makes a point of not deciding until one of the major parties offers him a good deal, clearly enjoying the prestige that comes with this role.

Although Winston's manipulative 'kingmaker' game is nothing new for New Zealand politics, it's particularly important that leftists give New Zealand First no quarter in the age of Trump. Left softness on racist right-wing populists is an example of Conservative Leftism, a tendency which throws oppressed people under the bus for the sake of simplistic anti-neoliberalism (see Daphne Lawless' *Against Conservative Leftism*⁵).

You cannot challenge capitalism while excusing racism. Capitalism is racialised; the dispossession of Māori was necessary to establishing capitalism in Aotearoa, and attacks on new (brown) migrants undermine working class unity. Winston Peters' populism undermines the internationalist alliances needed for a truly liberating politics.

Labour ran on cutting immigration in the tens of thousands. This policy was nonsensical – Labour proposed to cut students and 'low-skilled' workers, citing strains on infrastructure – yet students and poor workers are unlikely to use motorways or buy houses. Most likely the policy was less motivated by rational policy considerations than a pathetic attempt to chase the anti-migrant vote, which New Zealand First already has on lock-down.

Policies of cutting immigration face opposition from business, which is unfortunately more influential than opposition from migrant workers and their advocates. Business leaders oppose immigration cuts for the wrong reasons – hoping to access cheap labour – whereas we say that migrants must have the rights of any worker, including the right to union representation.



Even if these nonsensical poll-chasing policies are not implemented, they widen the ‘Overton window’ – the range of acceptable political discourse. They make attacks on migrants more socially acceptable, and pro-migrant reforms less likely.

Labour’s capitulation to xenophobia follows an unfortunate international trend. The UK’s Jeremy Corbyn may have more Social Democratic substance than Jacinda Ardern, but he has unfortunately pandered to anti-immigrant politics (see Daphne Lawless’ article here⁶).

After Labour’s sudden leadership shakeup, Jacinda Ardern’s campaign did not depart in substance from Andrew Little’s rather conservative campaign. She stuck to the policy of cutting immigration, and failed to stand with Metiria Turei against beneficiary-bashing. Despite superficially criticising ‘neoliberalism’, she did not commit to departing from neoliberal fundamentals when challenged⁷. Similarly she talked up the threat of climate change but made no significant commitments to address it.

However, a relatively young, rhetorically sophisticated woman in the leadership was a welcome

relief from the pale, stale male brigade that has dominated the Labour leadership for nearly a decade, attracting young liberals to the party. Conversely, Bill English lacked the personality appeal of John Key, leading National to defeat for the second time in his life.

A Labour government is usually slightly better than a National government. Except for the Fourth Labour government, Labour tends to spend more on social services than National, and work more closely with unions, among other social concessions. While this difference is marginal at a macro-level, we can’t totally deny any difference that results in fewer deaths by economic violence. For the anti-capitalist left however, no deaths by economic violence are acceptable, so a Labour-led government is not our horizon of possibility. Even the Greens remain limited to that horizon. Additionally, with Winston in the government, we can expect renewed attacks on migrants.

Ultimately, the parliamentary parties are all committed to managing capitalism. The left cliché that only collective direct action can stop the racist, capitalist juggernaut remains true. How to put this truth into practice in a principled, effective way remains the question.

¹ www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11842859

² www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2017/04/winston-peters-slams-immigrant-reporters.html

³ thespinoff.co.nz/politics/18-07-2017/what-really-makes-nz-first-tick-i-joined-the-party-and-headed-to-their-jamboree-to-find-out/

⁴ www.jacobinmag.com/2017/09/new-zealand-labour-national-ardern

⁵ fightback.org.nz/2016/02/15/against-conservative-leftism/

⁶ fightback.org.nz/2017/10/17/winning-with-conservative-leftism-jeremy-corbyn-and-brexit/

⁷ bat-bean-beam.blogspot.co.nz/2017/09/the-neoliberalism-question-notes-on.html

AOTEAROA/ NEW ZEALAND

Fightback's election activity: Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign

Fightback did not endorse any political party in 2017, supporting a Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign (MARRC) alongside other groups.

MARRC ran an independent candidate in Wellington Central: Gayaal Iddamalgoda, a Legal Organiser for FIRST Union. Gayaal ran on the platform that "what's best for migrants and refugees is best for everyone."

Gayaal's campaign offered a relatively mainstream platform to challenge electoral scapegoating of migrants and refugees. The campaign regularly cranked out press releases (see marrc.org.nz/blog), criticising every party, and receiving coverage in mainstream newspapers.

Candidates' meetings offered an opportunity to publicly challenge the major parties. In an electorate with Green Party leader James Shaw and high-ranking Labour MP Grant Robertson standing, we were able to challenge Labour and the Greens from the left.

One Labour MP, Hutt South's Chris Hipkins, criticised his party's policy when challenged by a member of the campaign at a candidates' meeting.

The Rainbow Forum was the liveliest, with the audience asking challenging questions, shutting down the Conservative and ACT candidates with-

out mercy, and wildly applauded Gayaal for outlining the intersection of queer and migrant rights.

The infamous Aro Valley candidates' forum was also energetic, as children sprayed candidates with water pistols. Gayaal in the words of the Dominion Post

*"won cheers from the inner-city crowd with his message of welcoming migrants and ending capitalism."*¹

MARRC also organised a Migrant and Refugee Rights Forum with Gayaal speaking alongside other candidates. Around 100 attended. Emcee Murdoch Stephens (of the Double the Quota campaign) challenged candidates on the refugee quota, on proposed immigration cuts, and on a Living Wage for migrant workers.

Sponsored Facebook posts received significant interactions, including a campaign video that was viewed over 3,600 times. Unfortunately, the Facebook page also received waves of racist comments, which admins did not tolerate.

Gayaal passed 150 votes, beating the other independents and the ACT Party candidate, a modest victory in a campaign more intended for propaganda than parliamentary purposes. Victoria University's polling booth had the most votes for

Gayaal, confirming international poll results that show youth tend to be more pro-migrant. We are in discussions about how to carry the Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign through to 2018. If you would like to be involved or updated, please email us at marrc.aotearoa@gmail.com.



¹ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/96250988/wonks-and-water-pistols-meet-the-candidates-evening-in-a-ro-valley-wellington>

UNITED KINGDOM

Winning with Conservative Leftism: Jeremy Corbyn and Brexit

By Daphne Lawless

British exit from the European Union (EU) is fast becoming a disaster acknowledged on all sides. Theresa May's Conservative (Tory) Government is making no headway in their negotiations with the EU's leaders on finding a way for the UK to leave the EU without causing a massive economic crash and social dislocation¹. The Tories are split between moderates who would like to keep the status quo as much as possible, maintaining many current EU institutions, on one hand; and on the other, a fanatical right-wing who'd prefer a "hard Brexit"². This would entail complete disentanglement from Europe's laws and institutions, creating some kind of deregulated tax-haven capitalist utopia, leaning heavily on Trump's USA.

Meanwhile, after shocking the world by winning the British Labour Party leadership in September 2015, veteran left MP Jeremy Corbyn again confounded his detractors by leading the party to a respectable second place in the June 2017 general election³. In left-wing politics, after 35 years of global neoliberal onslaught, sometimes victory can be its own argument. The feeling of many

activists seems to be that if Labour (or whoever the local centre-left party are) do well in an election, what they are doing must be right and the radical left is obliged to support them.

Certainly there's been a rush from various British Left groups to join the Labour Party to "back Jeremy" against his opponents within the party⁴. But there's such a thing as a Pyrrhic victory – winning at such a cost that the win was not worth it. Has "Corbynmania" been purchased at the cost of the British Left's principles – specifically its internationalism?

Brexit is reaction

There's a common myth on the Left that the vote for Brexit was some kind of "cross-ethnic working class uprising", a revolt against the neoliberal elite by the oppressed and excluded. But the British revolutionary group Socialist Resistance said at the time:

¹ <http://www.politico.eu/article/michel-barnier- david-davis- theresa-may- brexit-negotiations- part-1- a-tragicomedy-in- 5-acts/>

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-hard- soft-what- is-the- difference-uk- eu-single-market-freedom- move- ment-theresa- may-a7342591.html>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom_general_election,_2017

⁴ Many of their members have become part of the pro-Corbyn Momentum movement: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momentum_\(organisation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momentum_(organisation))

Most of the radical left supported an exit vote and the so-called Lexit [Left-Brexit] campaign – which had zero influence on the entire referendum. It peddled the illusion that a left exit was on offer when it was not... [T]hose in Lexit such as the SWP [Socialist Workers' Party] claim that it was a "revolt against the rich and powerful" and that the danger from racism "is far from inevitable".

They failed to recognise the dangers that the mainstream exit campaigns, led by right-wing xenophobes, represented. They were oblivious [to] the racism and hatred that would be generated by them, the reactionary impact this would have on the political situation and the balance of class forces, and dangers involved of being in any way associated with them—particularly in the case of an exit vote.

They chose to ignore (even when challenged) the damaging outcome that an exit vote would have for the 2.2m EU citizens living in this country whose status would have been threatened as a direct result.⁵

This analysis has been borne out by research showing that support for Brexit was "largely determined by authoritarianism, which is itself significantly linked with fear of diversity, novelty, uncertainty, and change."⁶ John Curtice, research fellow at the NatCen research agency, comments:

"Brexit is not an issue that divides those on the left from those on the right. Instead, it divides 'social liberals', that is, those who relatively comfortable living in a diverse society in which people follow different customs and social norms, and 'social conservatives', that is, those who feel that everyone should share

and respect a common culture. Those of the former view typically voted to Remain in the EU, while those of the later disposition usually backed Leave. Not least of the reasons why this is the case, of course, is that one of the central issues in the Brexit debate was and still is immigration...

'What clearly emerges from our analysis is that Labour's advance in the 2017 election was strongest not in left-wing Britain but rather in socially liberal Britain...'⁷

'Labour's advance in June then does not simply lie in the popularity of the more left-wing stance that the party adopted. Indeed, that may not have been particularly important at all. Rather, in an election in which Brexit and immigration were also central issues, Labour's advance was strongest amongst those who were keenest on staying in the EU and those who were least concerned about immigration.'

Most tellingly – the only ethnic group to back Brexit were white British⁸. Like a Trump voter, the best predictor of wanting to quit the EU was being white. Leftists trying to cheerlead for Brexit as a radical mass movement are making the same ghastly category error as who claimed that voters for Donald Trump were motivated by "economic anxiety" – out of over-optimism, cynicism or unacknowledged racism, attempting to take a groundswell of white nationalism and "paint it red".

Corbyn's successful fudge

Jeremy Corbyn, whatever else you can say, has the virtue of consistency, having opposed British membership of the EU since he became an MP in 1983. However, he toed his party's line and

⁵ <http://socialistresistance.org/brexit-vote- is-a- disaster-but- the-struggle- goes-on/8534>

⁶ <https://medium.com/@lukehawksbee/understanding-brexit- 61805c48683b>

⁷ <http://natcen.ac.uk/blog/who-voted- labour-in- 2017>

⁸ <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jamesball/heres-who- voted-for- brexit-and- who-didnt>

(unenthusiastically) backed Remain in the referendum. The next year, in the election campaign, the Labour Party cleverly “fudged” the issue of Brexit, seeking to attract both “Remainers” aghast at Tory bungling of the process, and traditional Labour voters in the North of England who had voted Leave or supported the near-fascist UK Independence Party (UKIP)⁹. It worked – in that Labour gained a few seats, despite universal media predictions of total disaster. But Labour still lost the election, and the Tories were able to stay in power with the support on confidence and supply of Northern Ireland’s DUP (Democratic Unionist Party), a group of fundamentalist Christian reactionaries.¹⁰

If some would argue that Corbyn’s performance was an endorsement of Brexit, research shows that voters who shifted to Labour in 2017, denying May her majority, were overwhelmingly “Remain” voters in 2016¹¹. More than half of Remain voters backed a Labour government, presumably as the best chance of stopping a hard Brexit.

Corbyn is now considered the credible alternative Prime Minister by the mainstream media – to the extent that apparently some Tories are talking quietly about his rise to power being “inevitable”.¹² Labour’s fudged position allows it to mercilessly attack the Tories’ hapless performance in negotiations with the EU, without exposing its own divisions.¹³ But it’s odd for self-described revolutionaries to be talking about the electoral fortunes of the British Labour Party to as if they were the same thing as the interests of the working masses.

Throwing migrants under the bus

Corbyn has stuck to the line taken by the radical left all the way back to the first, failed “Brexit” referendum in 1975. The argument made then by

opponents such as left-wing Labour legend Tony Benn was that the EEC (predecessor of the EU) was a “bosses’ club”, a cartel of capitalist states ganging up to impose pro-corporate politics all over Western Europe, in the days when Eastern Europe still belonged to the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence.

But a lot of things have changed over 42 years. The biggest difference between the EEC which Tony Benn opposed and the EU which Corbyn wants to leave is *free movement of workers between EU countries*, which was enacted in 1992¹⁴. Simply put, any citizen of an EU country has the right to live and work in the UK – just like New Zealanders may freely live and work in Australia. There’s of course no real reason why free movement of workers couldn’t still exist after Brexit, as it does with non-EU countries like Switzerland or Norway. But that would require continuing to abide by many EU rules and regulations– which certainly not be welcome to the reactionary, authoritarian, and mainly white bloc which dominated the Brexit majority.

Citizens of other EU countries now living in Britain – many of whom have put down roots and have families – are terrified for what will happen to them once Britain leaves the EU. The rising tide of hate crime in Britain is an important marker of how Brexit has encouraged racism and the fascist right, in the same way as Trump’s election in the US.¹⁵ American news network NBC reported:

Two words hit Nikola Cugova where it hurts: “Go home.”

That phrase has been directed at the 37-year-old Czech national a lot since just over half of voters rejected keeping the U.K. in the Euro-

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/09/corbyn-may- young-voters- labour-surge>

¹⁰ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tory-dup- deal-latest- news-northern- ireland-unionists-hung-parliament- minority-abortion- gay-rights- a7808151.html>

¹¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/remain-voters- tory-majority- election-labour- hard-brexit-conservatives-leave- eu-talks- minority-jeremy- a7871541.html>

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/21/jeremy-corbyn- labour-is- now-the- mainstream-with-tories-in- disarray>

¹³ <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/staggers/2017/10/jeremy-corbyn- only-politician- brexit-strategy-thats-working>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_movement_for_workers_in_the_European_Union

¹⁵ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit- vote-hate- crime-rise- 100-per- cent-england- wales-police- figures-new- racism-eu- a7580516.html>

pean Union in last June's "Brexit" referendum.

*"I hear English people say, 'Now it's Brexit, we're leaving the EU, go home,'" said Cugova, who moved to the U.K. 13 years ago. "My children were small when they came here. My daughter doesn't speak Czech and knows nothing about the Czech Republic."*¹⁶

Neil Faulkner on Britain's Left Unity website adds:

*There has been a permanent shift, underpinned by relentless anti-migrant messaging from the political elite and their media echo-chambers since the Brexit vote, giving confidence and licence to every closet racist who wants to spit at an East European.*¹⁷

It's important to remember that, no matter on what terms Britain actually leaves the EU, the political effect of Brexit has been a "green light" for the worst racists and reactionaries to come out from under their rocks – which is why the radical left which had no love for the Brussels bureaucracy were right to oppose Brexit. Meanwhile, British citizens who live and work in the other EU countries are waking up to the realisation that they may lose their rights as well.¹⁸

It's true that the EU's policy towards migrants from outside—where refugees are kept out on the borders with Turkey or Morocco with barbed-wire fences, or left no choice but to risk drowning in open boats in the Mediterranean Sea— is barbaric and racist and must be opposed.¹⁹ Is there any hope, though, that a UK "in control of its own borders" would be anything other than even more racist? One of the biggest ironies is, while Jeremy Corbyn has himself always been a promoter of Irish unity, Brexit would quite probably lead once

again to a "hard border" (fences and police checkpoints) between the two parts of Ireland – while under the EU, the border between the Republic and the northern Six Counties is nothing more than a sign on the A1 highway.²⁰

There have even been some attempts by "Lexiters" to make a socialist case against free movement – which boil down to the old "immigrants drag down wages" argument, that we in Aotearoa/NZ know how to reject when we hear it from our own Labour or NZ First. One particularly disgusting argument on the Labour Leave website (now deleted but available elsewhere²¹) was that migrant workers to Britain were "scabs", probably the worst insult that any unionist can make about another worker. The author even had the cheek to chide Eastern European workers for not appreciating living behind the barbed wire and concrete walls of Soviet-style "communism" while they had it! (One little-noticed story is how many of Jeremy Corbyn's major advisors, such as Seumas Milne or Andrew Murray, come from the pro-USSR political tradition.)

Other "Lexit" articles took the tack of depicting migrant workers (and foreigners in general) as an elite, privileged layer, contrasted to struggling native British workers.²² Such xenophobia, where "cosmopolitan" becomes an insult and nativist bigotry is treated as if it were class consciousness, is not only the exact same narrative used by American writers who want to alibi the racist Trump movement. It becomes the point where the radical left start talking like the radical right.

This is the growing tide of "red-brown" politics which I have warned against in previous articles²³. Such a Left has totally sold out its principles to jump on a bandwagon which is giving the liberal

¹⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/brexit-referendum/brexit-britain-migrants-fear-future-amid-questions-backlash-n765021>

¹⁷ <http://leftunity.org/brexit-democracy-and-oppression/>

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/27/british-citizens-living-eu-fear-they-will-become-mays-sacrificial-lambs>

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_migrant_crisis

²⁰ <https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21725012-nobody-wants-hard-border-which-might-include-passport-and-customs-controls-yet-there-no>

²¹ <http://www.kenbell.info/2017/07/scab-labour-is-issue-not-immigration.html>

²² <http://www.counterfire.org/articles/analysis/18397-this-vote-was-about-far-more-than-immigration>

²³ Beginning with: <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/02/15/against-conservative-leftism/>

centre a pummelling – from the fascist direction. Thankfully, a Labour Campaign for Free Movement has been set up to push back against this tide.²⁴

EU or UK: which is more reactionary?

Another argument is made by “Lexiters” that the EU stands between a Corbyn-led Labour government and a socialist transformation of the UK. Like many reactionary ideas, Brexit arguments of both left and right portray the UK as a weak victim of EU neoliberalism. However, the UK is in fact one of the EU’s three most powerful members – and, historically, the most neoliberal of them all. Since the election of Thatcher in 1979, it is in fact Britain which has pushed the EU in a neoliberal direction – not the other way around. At the recent Labour conference, Jeremy Corbyn claimed²⁴ that the EU would prevent a Labour government from nationalising companies²⁵ – at the very same time that France’s incoming centrist President, Emmanuel Macron, nationalised a shipyard to protect France’s “national interests”²⁶.

Economist Martin Sandbu recently wrote in the Financial Times (paywall):

*two lawyers have looked carefully at the general structure of state aid laws and how they would apply to the policies set out in the Labour manifesto. Their analysis concludes: “Neither EU state aid rules, nor other EU rules which are distinct from state aid rules but sometimes considered in the same bracket, provide any obvious barrier to the implementation in the UK of the measures contained in Labour’s 2017 election manifesto.”*²⁷

Lexiters want to make the argument about “democracy”. Firstly, there’s the argument that somehow opposing the outcome of the Brexit referendum is “undemocratic” – as if, once the majority has decided something, that question can never be revisited. Neil Faulkner again:

Both the Lexit Left and the Corbynista Left are arguing that socialists should ‘respect’ the Brexit vote. This argument is false. It is a betrayal of every migrant worker whose status has been threatened by the vote. And it is a massive concession to the racist discourse for which Brexit is now the primary framework.

...Referendums are particularly dubious. There is a long history of referendums being used by authoritarian regimes to enhance their legitimacy.

*Who is setting the agenda? Who is formulating the question? Who is supplying the information (or misinformation)? Whose interests are being served? To ask these questions is to underline the critical difference between their democracy and ours – the democracy of parliamentary (mis)representation and the democracy of mass assemblies.*²⁸

There’s also a populist idea that dismantling bigger entities and empowering smaller communities and countries is always more democratic and better for working people. But British Labour (like its leader) strongly opposes Scotland separating from the UK; while at the same time they are now criticising the EU for not supporting Catalonia’s right to separate from Spain. Similarly, there’s a lot of talk about how the EU has victimised Greece. But Greece’s forcible submission to the yoke of austerity came about because of its

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/labourfreemovement/>

²⁵ <https://leftfootforward.org/2017/09/labour-are-wrong-public-services-can-be-renationalised-while-remaining-in-the-eu/>

²⁶ <https://www.ft.com/content/303f7ac2-72d9-11e7-aca6-c6bd07df1a3c>

²⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/6afc158e-a296-11e7-9e4f-7f5e6a7c98a2?mhq5j=e6>; original article is behind paywall.

²⁸ See note 17.

membership of the single currency, the euro – not because of the EU itself, which only a tiny minority of Greeks want to leave.²⁹

The EU is not a democratic federal state, even to the extent that Germany, the US or Australia are. The European Parliament – which is elected by the people – has little control over the European Commission, who are the real “government” of the EU. The Commission is far more under the control of the various national governments – which is one reason why the Commission is being “leant on” by Spain to oppose Catalan separation, and why – while the UK was a staunch member of the EU – the Commission also opposed Scottish independence.

No matter how much British nationalists might spout romantic nonsense about their “mother of Parliaments”, the United Kingdom has no written constitution, very few guaranteed civil liberties, a crushed union movement and a parliament half elected by the undemocratic FPP system, and half (the House of Lords) which isn’t elected at all. British socialist John Game put it like this on Facebook:

The primary barriers to socialism are British laws, not European ones. Neo-Liberalism is practically in the European context a British invention. It is quite simply chauvinism to suggest anything else. In an odd way, if the old argument was that the EU couldn’t rescue us from the British state, the new argument has become that only the British state can rescue us from the EU. Which is obvious nonsense.

Lessons for the rest of us

1. Avoid nationalism. No socialist could defend

the current undemocratic, neoliberal and racist EU system with a straight face. But no-one could defend Hillary Clinton with a straight face either – until her opposition was Donald Trump, who whipped up racism and fascist currents, making the vulnerable more vulnerable, showing that there are worse things than neoliberalism. The British state is in important ways less democratic, and more racist, than the EU. It is significant that the separatist local governments of Scotland and Catalonia both wish to remain in the EU after independence – precisely because of its guarantees of some basic levels of civil liberties.

So one important point is – as I’ve mentioned in previous arguments – to strongly oppose attachment to “our own” nation state as an alternative to globalised neoliberalism. Not only does this cede important ground to fascism, it also whitewashes the colonial and imperialist bloodshed that set up all the existing nation-states on the planet.

2. Avoid the pressures of electoralism. Another important point is that for radicals, electoral politics should be one means among many to the end of social change. The real danger comes when all we can see is the parliamentary fight, or even worse, an intra-party factional battle. When socialists and radicals entered the British Labour Party, especially through the “Momentum” network, they immersed themselves deep in the cut-throat world of struggle within the bureaucracy of a major electoral party, against the various anti-Corbyn factions (ranging from old Blairites to liberal Europhiles).

One consequence of this – apart from burning out activist energy – is a regrettable consequence of seeing events in the wider world through the prism of that faction fight. When you set out to rebuild the world on new foundations, it’s hard to

²⁹ I wrote on this in <https://fightback.org.nz/2015/08/21/greek-crisis-syrizas-dead-end/>

accept that it all boils down to backroom deals and faction fighting within an organisation that most socialists wouldn't have touched with a ten-foot pole until recently. The fact that all sides agreed to not discuss Brexit at the recent Labour Party conference doesn't say much for a democratic culture in that party.³⁰

A related pitfall of electoral politics is falling into leader worship. Some have accused the Corbynists of being more interested in propping up "Jezza" as leader than fighting injustice out in the real world.³¹ Every issue in the world gets boiled down to "is this good or bad for Corbyn?" – to the point of conspiracy theory, where political events are sometimes argued to have been cooked up by media or the "Deep State" for the purposes of undermining Corbyn's leadership. Socialists in Aotearoa also have recent experience of being in broad formations where supporting the prestige or authority of a popular leader – for electoral or other purposes – overrode standing by radical principle.

3. Don't lie to yourself. "Lexit" is fundamentally a form of self-delusion, caused by a loss of faith in the power of the actually-existing movements to change the world. It is also something of a nostalgia trip for people whose ideas were formed in the 1970s, who are now trying to impose those ideas on the current movement. It replaces hope in the movements of the working class and the oppressed with cheerleading for the colonial, imperialist traditions of the UK against the neoliberal, technocratic EU. Some socialists have deluded themselves into going along with this through some kind of misplaced duty to be "optimistic" – to assume that any bandwagon must be going in a positive direction, just as some tried to paint the Trump movement red. This smacks of despera-

tion to "win" something, anything, even if it is part of a global swing towards the radical-Right which if not stopped would literally mean death to ethnic minorities, LGBTs, or indeed socialists.

A real radical-left movement in Britain would not necessarily want to keep Britain in the current EU structure. But it would support all the social gains of the EU – especially free movement of peoples between countries – while demanding their extension. It would support replacing both the EU structures and the UK state with democratic, responsive organs of power based on solidarity and responsible to their peoples, rather than to multinational capitalism – a true "Social Europe" accepting all migrants and refugees. As the old saying had it, "Another Europe Is Possible" which would give not one single inch to racist, xenophobic ideas. To bring this about, we must challenge the conservative left and the red-browns who have brought such ideas into the common sense of British Labour under Jeremy Corbyn.

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/24/labour-conference-accused-of-ducking-debate-over-brexit>

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/30/labour-conference-more-like-the-cult-of-saint-jeremy>



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The First White President

Article by Ta-Nehisi Coates, reprinted from The Atlantic.

IT IS INSUFFICIENT TO STATE the obvious of Donald Trump: that he is a white man who would not be president were it not for this fact. With one immediate exception, Trump's predecessors made their way to high office through the passive power of whiteness—that bloody heirloom which cannot ensure mastery of all events but can conjure a tailwind for most of them. Land theft and human plunder cleared the grounds for Trump's forefathers and barred others from it. Once upon the field, these men became soldiers, statesmen, and scholars; held court in Paris; presided at Princeton; advanced into the Wilderness and then into the White House. Their individual triumphs made this exclusive party seem above America's founding sins, and it was forgotten that the former was in fact bound to the latter, that all their victories had transpired on cleared grounds. No such elegant detachment can be attributed to Donald Trump—a president who, more than any other, has made the awful inheritance explicit.

His political career began in advocacy of birtherism, that modern recasting of the old American precept that black people are not fit to be citizens of the country they built. But long before birtherism, Trump had made his worldview clear. He fought to keep blacks out of his buildings, according to the U.S. government; called for the death penalty for the eventually exonerated Central Park Five; and railed against “lazy” black employees. “Black guys counting my money! I hate it,”

Trump was once quoted as saying. “The only kind of people I want counting my money are short guys that wear yarmulkes every day.” After his cabal of conspiracy theorists forced Barack Obama to present his birth certificate, Trump demanded the president's college grades (offering \$5 million in exchange for them), insisting that Obama was not intelligent enough to have gone to an Ivy League school, and that his acclaimed memoir, *Dreams From My Father*, had been ghostwritten by a white man, Bill Ayers.

It is often said that Trump has no real ideology, which is not true—his ideology is white supremacy, in all its truculent and sanctimonious power. Trump inaugurated his campaign by casting himself as the defender of white maidenhood against Mexican “rapists,” only to be later alleged by multiple accusers, and by his own proud words, to be a sexual violator himself. White supremacy has always had a perverse sexual tint. Trump's rise was shepherded by Steve Bannon, a man who mocks his white male critics as “cucks.” The word, derived from cuckold, is specifically meant to debase by fear and fantasy—the target is so weak that he would submit to the humiliation of having his white wife lie with black men. That the slur cuck casts white men as victims aligns with the dicta of whiteness, which seek to alchemize one's profligate sins into virtue. So it was with Virginia slaveholders claiming that Britain sought to make slaves of them. So it was with marauding

Klansmen organized against alleged rapes and other outrages. So it was with a candidate who called for a foreign power to hack his opponent's email and who now, as president, is claiming to be the victim of "the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history."

In Trump, white supremacists see one of their own. Only grudgingly did Trump denounce the Ku Klux Klan and David Duke, one of its former grand wizards—and after the clashes between white supremacists and counterprotesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August, Duke in turn praised Trump's contentious claim that "both sides" were responsible for the violence.

Trump's political career began in advocacy of birtherism. But long before that, he had made his worldview clear.

To Trump, whiteness is neither notional nor symbolic but is the very core of his power. In this, Trump is not singular. But whereas his forebears carried whiteness like an ancestral talisman, Trump cracked the glowing amulet open, releasing its eldritch energies. The repercussions are striking: Trump is the first president to have served in no public capacity before ascending to his perch. But more telling, Trump is also the first president to have publicly affirmed that his daughter is a "piece of ass." The mind seizes trying to imagine a black man extolling the virtues of sexual assault on tape ("When you're a star, they let you do it"), fending off multiple accusations of such assaults, immersed in multiple lawsuits for allegedly fraudulent business dealings, exhorting his followers to violence, and then strolling into the White House. But that is the point of white supremacy—to ensure that that which all others achieve with maximal effort, white people (particularly white men) achieve with minimal qualification. Barack Obama delivered to black people the hoary message that if they work twice as hard as white people, anything is possible. But Trump's counter is persuasive: Work half as hard as black people, and even more is possible.

For Trump, it almost seems that the fact of Obama, the fact of a black president, insult-

ed him personally. The insult intensified when Obama and Seth Meyers publicly humiliated him at the White House Correspondents' Dinner in 2011. But the bloody heirloom ensures the last laugh. Replacing Obama is not enough—Trump has made the negation of Obama's legacy the foundation of his own. And this too is whiteness. "Race is an idea, not a fact," the historian Nell Irvin Painter has written, and essential to the construct of a "white race" is the idea of not being a nigger. Before Barack Obama, niggers could be manufactured out of Sister Souljahs, Willie Hortons, and Dusky Sallys. But Donald Trump arrived in the wake of something more potent—an entire nigger presidency with nigger health care, nigger climate accords, and nigger justice reform, all of which could be targeted for destruction or redemption, thus reifying the idea of being white. Trump truly is something new—the first president whose entire political existence hinges on the fact of a black president. And so it will not suffice to say that Trump is a white man like all the others who rose to become president. He must be called by his rightful honorific—America's first white president.

THE SCOPE OF TRUMP'S commitment to whiteness is matched only by the depth of popular disbelief in the power of whiteness. We are now being told that support for Trump's "Muslim ban," his scapegoating of immigrants, his defenses of police brutality are somehow the natural outgrowth of the cultural and economic gap between Lena Dunham's America and Jeff Foxworthy's. The collective verdict holds that the Democratic Party lost its way when it abandoned everyday economic issues like job creation for the softer fare of social justice. The indictment continues: To their neoliberal economics, Democrats and liberals have married a condescending elitist affect that sneers at blue-collar culture and mocks the white man as history's greatest monster and prime-time television's biggest doofus. In this rendition, Donald Trump is not the product of white supremacy so much as the product of a backlash against contempt for white working-class people.

"We so obviously despise them, we so obviously condescend to them," the conservative social

scientist Charles Murray, who co-wrote *The Bell Curve*, recently told *The New Yorker*¹, speaking of the white working class. “The only slur you can use at a dinner party and get away with is to call somebody a redneck—that won’t give you any problems in Manhattan.”

White Americans elected an orcish reality-TV star who insists on taking his intelligence briefings in picture-book form.

“The utter contempt with which privileged Eastern liberals such as myself discuss red-state, gun-country, working-class America as ridiculous and morons and rubes,” charged the celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, “is largely responsible for the upswell of rage and contempt and desire to pull down the temple that we’re seeing now.”²

That black people, who have lived for centuries under such derision and condescension, have not yet been driven into the arms of Trump does not trouble these theoreticians. After all, in this analysis, Trump’s racism and the racism of his supporters are incidental to his rise. Indeed, the alleged glee with which liberals call out Trump’s bigotry is assigned even more power than the bigotry itself. Ostensibly assaulted by campus protests, battered by arguments about intersectionality, and oppressed by new bathroom rights, a blameless white working class did the only thing any reasonable polity might: elect an orcish reality-television star who insists on taking his intelligence briefings in picture-book form.

Asserting that Trump’s rise was primarily powered by cultural resentment and economic reversal has become de rigueur among white pundits and thought leaders. But evidence for this is, at best, mixed. In a study of preelection polling data, the Gallup researchers Jonathan Rothwell and Pablo Diego-Rosell found that “people living in areas with diminished economic opportunity” were “somewhat more likely to support Trump.” But the researchers also found that voters in their study who supported Trump generally had a higher mean household income (\$81,898) than those who did not (\$77,046). Those who approved of Trump were “less likely to be unemployed and

less likely to be employed part-time” than those who did not. They also tended to be from areas that were very white: “The racial and ethnic isolation of whites at the zip code level is one of the strongest predictors of Trump support.”

An analysis of exit polls conducted during the presidential primaries estimated the median household income of Trump supporters to be about \$72,000. But even this lower number is almost double the median household income of African Americans, and \$15,000 above the American median. Trump’s white support was not determined by income. According to Edison Research, Trump won whites making less than \$50,000 by 20 points, whites making \$50,000 to \$99,999 by 28 points, and whites making \$100,000 or more by 14 points. This shows that Trump assembled a broad white coalition that ran the gamut from Joe the Dishwasher to Joe the Plumber to Joe the Banker. So when white pundits cast the elevation of Trump as the handiwork of an inscrutable white working class, they are being too modest, declining to claim credit for their own economic class. Trump’s dominance among whites across class lines is of a piece with his larger dominance across nearly every white demographic. Trump won white women (+9) and white men (+31). He won white people with college degrees (+3) and white people without them (+37). He won whites ages 18–29 (+4), 30–44 (+17), 45–64 (+28), and 65 and older (+19). Trump won whites in midwestern Illinois (+11), whites in mid-Atlantic New Jersey (+12), and whites in the Sun Belt’s New Mexico (+5). In no state that Edison polled did Trump’s white support dip below 40 percent. Hillary Clinton’s did, in states as disparate as Florida, Utah, Indiana, and Kentucky. From the beer track to the wine track, from soccer moms to nascar dads, Trump’s performance among whites was dominant. According to Mother Jones, based on preelection polling data, if you tallied the popular vote of only white America to derive 2016 electoral votes, Trump would have defeated Clinton 389 to 81, with the remaining 68 votes either a toss-up or unknown.

Part of Trump’s dominance among whites resulted from his running as a Republican, the party

that has long cultivated white voters. Trump's share of the white vote was similar to Mitt Romney's in 2012. But unlike Romney, Trump secured this support by running against his party's leadership, against accepted campaign orthodoxy, and against all notions of decency. By his sixth month in office, embroiled in scandal after scandal, a Pew Research Center poll found Trump's approval rating underwater with every single demographic group. Every demographic group, that is, except one: people who identified as white.

The focus on one subsector of Trump voters—the white working class—is puzzling, given the breadth of his white coalition. Indeed, there is a kind of theater at work in which Trump's presidency is pawned off as a product of the white working class as opposed to a product of an entire whiteness that includes the very authors doing the pawning. The motive is clear: escapism. To accept that the bloody heirloom remains potent even now, some five decades after Martin Luther King Jr. was gunned down on a Memphis balcony—even after a black president; indeed, strengthened by the fact of that black president—is to accept that racism remains, as it has since 1776, at the heart of this country's political life. The idea of acceptance frustrates the left. The left would much rather have a discussion about class struggles, which might entice the white working masses, instead of about the racist struggles that those same masses have historically been the agents and beneficiaries of. Moreover, to accept that whiteness brought us Donald Trump is to accept whiteness as an existential danger to the country and the world. But if the broad and remarkable white support for Donald Trump can be reduced to the righteous anger of a noble class of smallville firefighters and evangelicals, mocked by Brooklyn hipsters and womanist professors into voting against their interests, then the threat of racism and whiteness, the threat of the heirloom, can be dismissed. Consciences can be eased; no deeper existential reckoning is required.

An opioid epidemic is greeted with calls for compassion and treatment; a crack epidemic is greeted with scorn and mandatory minimums.

This transfiguration is not novel. It is a return to form. The tightly intertwined stories of the white working class and black Americans go back to the prehistory of the United States—and the use of one as a cudgel to silence the claims of the other goes back nearly as far. Like the black working class, the white working class originated in bondage—the former in the lifelong bondage of slavery, the latter in the temporary bondage of indenture. In the early 17th century, these two classes were remarkably, though not totally, free of racist enmity. But by the 18th century, the country's master class had begun etching race into law while phasing out indentured servitude in favor of a more enduring labor solution. From these and other changes of law and economy, a bargain emerged: The descendants of indenture would enjoy the full benefits of whiteness, the most definitional benefit being that they would never sink to the level of the slave. But if the bargain protected white workers from slavery, it did not protect them from near-slave wages or backbreaking labor to attain them, and always there lurked a fear of having their benefits revoked. This early white working class “expressed soaring desires to be rid of the age-old inequalities of Europe and of any hint of slavery,” according to David R. Roediger, a professor of American studies at the University of Kansas. “They also expressed the rather more pedestrian goal of simply not being mistaken for slaves, or ‘negers’ or ‘negurs.’”

Roediger relates the experience, around 1807, of a British investor who made the mistake of asking a white maid in New England whether her “master” was home. The maid admonished the investor, not merely for implying that she had a “master” and thus was a “sarvant” but for his basic ignorance of American hierarchy. “None but negers are sarvants,” the maid is reported to have said. In law and economics and then in custom, a racist distinction not limited to the household emerged between the “help” (or the “freemen,” or the white workers) and the “servants” (the “negers,” the slaves). The former were virtuous and just, worthy of citizenship, progeny of Jefferson and, later, Jackson. The latter were servile and parasitic, dim-witted and lazy, the children

of African savagery. But the dignity accorded to white labor was situational, dependent on the scorn heaped upon black labor—much as the honor accorded a “virtuous lady” was dependent on the derision directed at a “loose woman.” And like chivalrous gentlemen who claim to honor the lady while raping the “whore,” planters and their apologists could claim to honor white labor while driving the enslaved.

And so George Fitzhugh, a prominent 19th-century Southern pro-slavery intellectual, could in a single stroke deplore the exploitation of free whites’ labor while defending the exploitation of enslaved blacks’ labor. Fitzhugh attacked white capitalists as “cannibals,” feeding off the labor of their fellow whites. The white workers were “‘slaves without masters;’ the little fish, who were food for all the larger.” Fitzhugh inveighed against a “professional man” who’d “amassed a fortune” by exploiting his fellow whites. But whereas Fitzhugh imagined white workers as devoured by capital, he imagined black workers as elevated by enslavement. The slaveholder “provided for them, with almost parental affection”—even when the loafing slave “feigned to be unfit for labor.” Fitzhugh proved too explicit—going so far as to argue that white laborers might be better off if enslaved. (“If white slavery be morally wrong,” he wrote, “the Bible cannot be true.”) Nevertheless, the argument that America’s original sin was not deep-seated white supremacy but rather the exploitation of white labor by white capitalists—“white slavery”—proved durable. Indeed, the panic of white slavery lives on in our politics today. Black workers suffer because it was and is our lot. But when white workers suffer, something in nature has gone awry. And so an opioid epidemic among mostly white people is greeted with calls for compassion and treatment, as all epidemics should be, while a crack epidemic among mostly black people is greeted with scorn and mandatory minimums. Sympathetic op-ed columns and articles are devoted to the plight of working-class whites when their life expectancy plummets to levels that, for blacks, society has simply accepted as normal. White slavery is sin. Nigger slavery is natural. This dynamic serves a very real purpose: the consistent awarding of grievance and moral

high ground to that class of workers which, by the bonds of whiteness, stands closest to America’s aristocratic class.

This is by design. Speaking in 1848, Senator John C. Calhoun saw slavery as the explicit foundation for a democratic union among whites, working and not:

With us the two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black; and all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals.

On the eve of secession, Jefferson Davis, the eventual president of the Confederacy, pushed the idea further, arguing that such equality between the white working class and white oligarchs could not exist at all without black slavery:

I say that the lower race of human beings that constitute the substratum of what is termed the slave population of the South, elevates every white man in our community ... It is the presence of a lower caste, those lower by their mental and physical organization, controlled by the higher intellect of the white man, that gives this superiority to the white laborer. Menial services are not there performed by the white man. We have none of our brethren sunk to the degradation of being menials. That belongs to the lower race—the descendants of Ham.

Southern intellectuals found a shade of agreement with Northern white reformers who, while not agreeing on slavery, agreed on the nature of the most tragic victim of emerging capitalism. “I was formerly like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of slavery,” the labor reformer George Henry Evans argued in a letter to the abolitionist Gerrit Smith. “This was before I saw that there was white slavery.” Evans was a putative ally of Smith and his fellow abolitionists. But still he asserted that “the landless white” was worse off than the enslaved black, who at least enjoyed “surety of support in sickness and old age.”

Invokers of “white slavery” held that there was nothing unique in the enslavement of blacks when measured against the enslavement of all workers. What evil there was in enslavement resulted from its status as a subsidiary of the broader exploitation better seen among the country’s noble laboring whites. Once the larger problem of white exploitation was solved, the dependent problem of black exploitation could be confronted or perhaps would fade away. Abolitionists focused on slavery were dismissed as “substitutionists” who wished to trade one form of slavery for another. “If I am less troubled concerning the Slavery prevalent in Charleston or New-Orleans,” wrote the reformer Horace Greeley, “it is because I see so much Slavery in New-York, which appears to claim my first efforts.”

Firsthand reports by white Union soldiers who witnessed actual slavery during the Civil War rendered the “white slavery” argument ridiculous. But its operating premises—white labor as noble archetype, and black labor as something else—lived on. This was a matter of rhetoric, not fact. The noble-white-labor archetype did not give white workers immunity from capitalism. It could not, in itself, break monopolies, alleviate white poverty in Appalachia or the South, or bring a decent wage to immigrant ghettos in the North. But the model for America’s original identity politics was set. Black lives literally did not matter and could be cast aside altogether as the price of even incremental gains for the white masses. It was this juxtaposition that allowed Theodore Bilbo to campaign for the Senate in the 1930s as someone who would “raise the same kind of hell as President Roosevelt” and later endorse lynching black people to keep them from voting.

The juxtaposition between the valid and even virtuous interests of the “working class” and the invalid and pathological interests of black Americans was not the province merely of blatant white supremacists like Bilbo. The acclaimed scholar, liberal hero, and future senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in his time working for President Richard Nixon, approvingly quoted Nixon’s formulation of the white working class: “A new voice” was beginning to make itself felt in the country.

“It is a voice that has been silent too long,” Nixon claimed, alluding to working-class whites. “It is a voice of people who have not taken to the streets before, who have not indulged in violence, who have not broken the law.”

It had been only 18 years since the Cicero riots; eight years since Daisy and Bill Myers had been run out of Levittown, Pennsylvania; three years since Martin Luther King Jr. had been stoned while walking through Chicago’s Marquette Park. But as the myth of the virtuous white working class was made central to American identity, its sins needed to be rendered invisible. The fact was, working-class whites had been agents of racist terrorism since at least the draft riots of 1863; terrorism could not be neatly separated from the racist animus found in every class of whites. Indeed, in the era of lynching, the daily newspapers often whipped up the fury of the white masses by invoking the last species of property that all white men held in common—white women. But to conceal the breadth of white racism, these racist outbursts were often disregarded or treated not as racism but as the unfortunate side effect of legitimate grievances against capital. By focusing on that sympathetic laboring class, the sins of whiteness itself were, and are still being, evaded.

When David Duke, the former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, shocked the country in 1990 by almost winning one of Louisiana’s seats in the U.S. Senate, the apologists came out once again. They elided the obvious—that Duke had appealed to the racist instincts of a state whose schools are, at this very moment, still desegregating—and instead decided that something else was afoot. “There is a tremendous amount of anger and frustration among working-class whites, particularly where there is an economic downturn,” a researcher told the *Los Angeles Times*. “These people feel left out; they feel government is not responsive to them.” By this logic, postwar America—with its booming economy and low unemployment—should have been an egalitarian utopia and not the violently segregated country it actually was.

But this was the past made present. It was not important to the apologists that a large swath of Louisiana's white population thought it was a good idea to send a white supremacist who once fronted a terrorist organization to the nation's capital. Nor was it important that blacks in Louisiana had long felt left out. What was important was the fraying of an ancient bargain, and the potential degradation of white workers to the level of "negers." "A viable left must find a way to differentiate itself strongly from such analysis," David Roediger, the University of Kansas professor, has written.

That challenge of differentiation has largely been ignored. Instead, an imagined white working class remains central to our politics and to our cultural understanding of those politics, not simply when it comes to addressing broad economic issues but also when it comes to addressing racism. At its most sympathetic, this belief holds that most Americans—regardless of race—are exploited by an unfettered capitalist economy. The key, then, is to address those broader patterns that afflict the masses of all races; the people who suffer from those patterns more than others (blacks, for instance) will benefit disproportionately from that which benefits everyone. "These days, what ails working-class and middle-class blacks and Latinos is not fundamentally different from what ails their white counterparts," Senator Barack Obama wrote in 2006:

Downsizing, outsourcing, automation, wage stagnation, the dismantling of employer-based health-care and pension plans, and schools that fail to teach young people the skills they need to compete in a global economy.

Obama allowed that "blacks in particular have been vulnerable to these trends"—but less because of racism than for reasons of geography and job-sector distribution. This notion—raceless antiracism—marks the modern left, from the New Democrat Bill Clinton to the socialist Bernie Sanders. Few national liberal politicians have shown any recognition that there is something systemic and particular in the relationship between black people and their country that might require specif-

ic policy solutions.

IN 2016, HILLARY CLINTON acknowledged the existence of systemic racism more explicitly than any of her modern Democratic predecessors. She had to—black voters remembered too well the previous Clinton administration, as well as her previous campaign. While her husband's administration had touted the rising-tide theory of economic growth, it did so while slashing welfare and getting "tough on crime," a phrase that stood for specific policies but also served as rhetorical bait for white voters. One is tempted to excuse Hillary Clinton from having to answer for the sins of her husband. But in her 2008 campaign, she evoked the old dichotomy between white workers and loafing blacks, claiming to be the representative of "hardworking Americans, white Americans." By the end of the 2008 primary campaign against Barack Obama, her advisers were hoping someone would uncover an apocryphal "whitey tape," in which an angry Michelle Obama was alleged to have used the slur. During Bill Clinton's presidential-reelection campaign in the mid-1990s, Hillary Clinton herself had endorsed the "super-predator" theory of William J. Bennett, John P. Walters, and John J. Dilulio Jr. This theory cast "inner-city" children of that era as "almost completely unmoralized" and the font of "a new generation of street criminals ... the youngest, biggest and baddest generation any society has ever known." The "baddest generation" did not become super-predators. But by 2016, they were young adults, many of whom judged Hillary Clinton's newfound consciousness to be lacking.

It's worth asking why the country has not been treated to a raft of sympathetic portraits of this "forgotten" young black electorate, forsaken by a Washington bought off by Davos elites and special interests. The unemployment rate for young blacks (20.6 percent) in July 2016 was double that of young whites (9.9 percent). And since the late 1970s, William Julius Wilson and other social scientists following in his wake have noted the disproportionate effect that the decline in manufacturing jobs has had on African American communities. If anyone should be angered by the devastation wreaked by the financial sector

and a government that declined to prosecute the perpetrators, it is African Americans—the housing crisis was one of the primary drivers in the past 20 years of the wealth gap between black families and the rest of the country. But the cultural condescension toward and economic anxiety of black people is not news. Toiling blacks are in their proper state; toiling whites raise the specter of white slavery.

Moreover, a narrative of long-neglected working-class black voters, injured by globalization and the financial crisis, forsaken by out-of-touch politicians, and rightfully suspicious of a return of Clintonism, does not serve to cleanse the conscience of white people for having elected Donald Trump. Only the idea of a long-suffering white working class can do that. And though much has been written about the distance between elites and “Real America,” the existence of a class-transcending, mutually dependent tribe of white people is evident.

Joe Biden, then the vice president, last year:

“They’re all the people I grew up with ... And they’re not racist. They’re not sexist.”

Bernie Sanders, senator and former candidate for president, last year:

“I come from the white working class, and I am deeply humiliated that the Democratic Party cannot talk to the people where I came from.”

Nicholas Kristof, the New York Times columnist, in February of this year:

My hometown, Yamhill, Ore., a farming community, is Trump country, and I have many friends who voted for Trump. I think they’re profoundly wrong, but please don’t dismiss them as hateful bigots.

These claims of origin and fidelity are not merely elite defenses of an aggrieved class but also a sweeping dismissal of the concerns of those who don’t share kinship with white men. “You can’t

eat equality,” asserts Joe Biden—a statement worthy of someone unthreatened by the loss of wages brought on by an unwanted pregnancy, a background-check box at the bottom of a job application, or the deportation of a breadwinner. Within a week of Sanders lambasting Democrats for not speaking to “the people” where he “came from,” he was making an example of a woman who dreamed of representing the people where she came from. Confronted with a young woman who hoped to become the second Latina senator in American history, Sanders responded with a parody of the Clinton campaign: “It is not good enough for someone to say, ‘I’m a woman! Vote for me!’ No, that’s not good enough ... One of the struggles that you’re going to be seeing in the Democratic Party is whether we go beyond identity politics.” The upshot—attacking one specimen of identity politics after having invoked another—was unfortunate.

Other Sanders appearances proved even more alarming. On MSNBC, he attributed Trump’s success, in part, to his willingness to “not be politically correct.” Sanders admitted that Trump had “said some outrageous and painful things, but I think people are tired of the same old, same old political rhetoric.” Pressed on the definition of political correctness, Sanders gave an answer Trump surely would have approved of. “What it means is you have a set of talking points which have been poll-tested and focus-group-tested,” Sanders explained. “And that’s what you say rather than what’s really going on. And often, what you are not allowed to say are things which offend very, very powerful people.”

This definition of political correctness was shocking coming from a politician of the left. But it matched a broader defense of Trump voters. “Some people think that the people who voted for Trump are racists and sexists and homophobes and just deplorable folks,” Sanders said later. “I don’t agree.” This is not exculpatory. Certainly not every Trump voter is a white supremacist, just as not every white person in the Jim Crow South was a white supremacist. But every Trump voter felt it acceptable to hand the fate of the country over to one.

One can, to some extent, understand politicians' embracing a self-serving identity politics. Candidates for high office, such as Sanders, have to cobble together a coalition. The white working class is seen, understandably, as a large cache of potential votes, and capturing these votes requires eliding uncomfortable truths. But journalists have no such excuse. Again and again in the past year, Nicholas Kristof could be found pleading with his fellow liberals not to dismiss his old comrades in the white working class as bigots—even when their bigotry was evidenced in his own reporting. A visit to Tulsa, Oklahoma, finds Kristof wondering why Trump voters support a president who threatens to cut the programs they depend on. But the problem, according to Kristof's interviewees, isn't Trump's attack on benefits so much as an attack on their benefits. "There's a lot of wasteful spending, so cut other places," one man tells Kristof. When Kristof pushes his subjects to identify that wasteful spending, a fascinating target is revealed: "Obama phones," the products of a fevered conspiracy theory that turned a long-standing government program into a scheme through which the then-president gave away free cellphones to undeserving blacks. Kristof doesn't shift his analysis based on this comment and, aside from a one-sentence fact-check tucked between parentheses, continues on as though it were never said.

Observing a Trump supporter in the act of deploying racism does not much perturb Kristof. That is because his defenses of the innate goodness of Trump voters and of the innate goodness of the white working class are in fact defenses of neither. On the contrary, the white working class functions rhetorically not as a real community of people so much as a tool to quiet the demands of those who want a more inclusive America.

Mark Lilla's New York Times essay "*The End of Identity Liberalism*,"³ published not long after last year's election, is perhaps the most profound example of this genre. Lilla denounces the perversion of liberalism into "a kind of moral panic about racial, gender and sexual identity," which distorted liberalism's message "and prevented it from becoming a unifying force capable of gov-

erning." Liberals have turned away from their working-class base, he says, and must look to the "pre-identity liberalism" of Bill Clinton and Franklin D. Roosevelt. You would never know from this essay that Bill Clinton was one of the most skillful identity politicians of his era—flying home to Arkansas to see a black man, the lobotomized Ricky Ray Rector, executed; upstaging Jesse Jackson at his own conference; signing the Defense of Marriage Act. Nor would you know that the "pre-identity" liberal champion Roosevelt depended on the literally lethal identity politics of the white-supremacist "solid South." The name Barack Obama does not appear in Lilla's essay, and he never attempts to grapple, one way or another, with the fact that it was identity politics—the possibility of the first black president—that brought a record number of black voters to the polls, winning the election for the Democratic Party, and thus enabling the deliverance of the ancient liberal goal of national health care. "Identity politics ... is largely expressive, not persuasive," Lilla claims. "Which is why it never wins elections—but can lose them." That Trump ran and won on identity politics is beyond Lilla's powers of conception. What appeals to the white working class is ennobled. What appeals to black workers, and all others outside the tribe, is dastardly identitarianism. All politics are identity politics—except the politics of white people, the politics of the bloody heirloom.

White tribalism haunts even more-nuanced writers. George Packer's New Yorker essay "*The Unconnected*" is a lengthy plea for liberals to focus more on the white working class, a population that "has succumbed to the ills that used to be associated with the black urban 'underclass.'" Packer believes that these ills, and the Democratic Party's failure to respond to them, explain much of Trump's rise. Packer offers no opinion polls to weigh white workers' views on "elites," much less their views on racism. He offers no sense of how their views and their relationship to Trump differ from other workers' and other whites'.

That is likely because any empirical evaluation of the relationship between Trump and the white working class would reveal that one adjective in

that phrase is doing more work than the other. In 2016, Trump enjoyed majority or plurality support among every economic branch of whites. It is true that his strongest support among whites came from those making \$50,000 to \$99,999. This would be something more than working-class in many nonwhite neighborhoods, but even if one accepts that branch as the working class, the difference between how various groups in this income bracket voted is revealing. Sixty-one percent of whites in this “working class” supported Trump. Only 24 percent of Hispanics and 11 percent of blacks did. Indeed, the plurality of all voters making less than \$100,000 and the majority making less than \$50,000 voted for the Democratic candidate. So when Packer laments the fact that “Democrats can no longer really claim to be the party of working people—not white ones, anyway,” he commits a kind of category error. The real problem is that Democrats aren’t the party of white people—working or otherwise. White workers are not divided by the fact of labor from other white demographics; they are divided from all other laborers by the fact of their whiteness.

Packer’s essay was published before the election, and so the vote tally was not available. But it should not be surprising that a Republican candidate making a direct appeal to racism would drive up the numbers among white voters, given that racism has been a dividing line for the national parties since the civil-rights era. Packer finds inspiration for his thesis in West Virginia—a state that remained Democratic through the 1990s before turning decisively Republican, at least at the level of presidential politics. This relatively recent rightward movement evinces, to Packer, a shift “that couldn’t be attributed just to the politics of race.” This is likely true—the politics of race are, themselves, never attributable “just to the politics of race.” The history of slavery is also about the growth of international capitalism; the history of lynching must be seen in light of anxiety over the growing independence of women; the civil-rights movement can’t be disentangled from the Cold War. Thus, to say that the rise of Donald Trump is about more than race is to make an empty statement, one that is small comfort to the people—black, Muslim, immigrant—who live under

racism’s boot.

The dent of racism is not hard to detect in West Virginia. In the 2008 Democratic primary there, 95 percent of the voters were white. Twenty percent of those—one in five—openly admitted that race was influencing their vote, and more than 80 percent voted for Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama. Four years later, the incumbent Obama lost the primary in 10 counties to Keith Judd, a white felon incarcerated in a federal prison; Judd racked up more than 40 percent of the Democratic-primary vote in the state. A simple thought experiment: Can one imagine a black felon in a federal prison running in a primary against an incumbent white president doing so well?

But racism occupies a mostly passive place in Packer’s essay. There’s no attempt to understand why black and brown workers, victimized by the same new economy and cosmopolitan elite that Packer lambastes, did not join the Trump revolution. Like Kristof, Packer is gentle with his subjects. When a woman “exploded” and told Packer, “I want to eat what I want to eat, and for them to tell me I can’t eat French fries or Coca-Cola—no way,” he sees this as a rebellion against “the moral superiority of elites.” In fact, this elite conspiracy dates back to 1894, when the government first began advising Americans on their diets. As recently as 2002, President George W. Bush launched the HealthierUS initiative, urging Americans to exercise and eat healthy food. But Packer never allows himself to wonder whether the explosion he witnessed had anything to do with the fact that similar advice now came from the country’s first black first lady. Packer concludes that Obama was leaving the country “more divided and angrier than most Americans can remember,” a statement that is likely true only because most Americans identify as white. Certainly the men and women forced to live in the wake of the beating of John Lewis, the lynching of Emmett Till, the firebombing of Percy Julian’s home, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Medgar Evers would disagree.

Trump's legacy will be exposing the patina of decency for what it is and revealing just how much a demagogue can get away with.

The triumph of Trump's campaign of bigotry presented the problematic spectacle of an American president succeeding at best in spite of his racism and possibly because of it. Trump moved racism from the euphemistic and plausibly deniable to the overt and freely claimed. This presented the country's thinking class with a dilemma. Hillary Clinton simply could not be correct when she asserted that a large group of Americans was endorsing a candidate because of bigotry. The implications—that systemic bigotry is still central to our politics; that the country is susceptible to such bigotry; that the salt-of-the-earth Americans whom we lionize in our culture and politics are not so different from those same Americans who grin back at us in lynching photos; that Calhoun's aim of a pan-Caucasian embrace between workers and capitalists still endures—were just too dark. Leftists would have to cope with the failure, yet again, of class unity in the face of racism. Incorporating all of this into an analysis of America and the path forward proved too much to ask. Instead, the response has largely been an argument aimed at emotion—the summoning of the white working class, emblem of America's hard-scrabble roots, inheritor of its pioneer spirit, as a shield against the horrific and empirical evidence of trenchant bigotry.

Packer dismisses the Democratic Party as a coalition of “rising professionals and diversity.” The dismissal is derived from, of all people, Lawrence Summers, the former Harvard president and White House economist, who last year labeled the Democratic Party “a coalition of the cosmopolitan elite and diversity.” The inference is that the party has forgotten how to speak on hard economic issues and prefers discussing presumably softer cultural issues such as “diversity.” It's worth unpacking what, precisely, falls under this rubric of “diversity”—resistance to the monstrous incarceration of legions of black men, resistance to the destruction of health providers for poor women, resistance to the effort to deport parents, resistance to a policing whose sole legitimacy is

rooted in brute force, resistance to a theory of education that preaches “no excuses” to black and brown children, even as excuses are proffered for mendacious corporate executives “too big to jail.” That this suite of concerns, taken together, can be dismissed by both an elite economist like Summers and a brilliant journalist like Packer as “diversity” simply reveals the safe space they enjoy. Because of their identity.

WHEN BARACK OBAMA came into office, in 2009, he believed that he could work with “sensible” conservatives by embracing aspects of their policy as his own. Instead he found that his very imprimatur made that impossible. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that the GOP's primary goal was not to find common ground but to make Obama a “one-term president.” A health-care plan inspired by Romneycare was, when proposed by Obama, suddenly considered socialist and, not coincidentally, a form of reparations. The first black president found that he was personally toxic to the GOP base. An entire political party was organized around the explicit aim of negating one man. It was thought by Obama and some of his allies that this toxicity was the result of a relentless assault waged by Fox News and right-wing talk radio. Trump's genius was to see that it was something more, that it was a hunger for revanche so strong that a political novice and accused rapist could topple the leadership of one major party and throttle the heavily favored nominee of the other.

“I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters,” Trump bragged in January 2016. This statement should be met with only a modicum of skepticism. Trump has mocked the disabled, withstood multiple accusations of sexual violence (all of which he has denied), fired an FBI director, sent his minions to mislead the public about his motives, personally exposed those lies by boldly stating his aim to scuttle an investigation into his possible collusion with a foreign power, then bragged about that same obstruction to representatives of that same foreign power. It is utterly impossible to conjure a black facsimile of Donald Trump—to imagine Obama, say, implicating an opponent's

father in the assassination of an American president or comparing his physical endowment with that of another candidate and then successfully capturing the presidency. Trump, more than any other politician, understood the valence of the bloody heirloom and the great power in not being a nigger.

But the power is ultimately suicidal. Trump evinces this, too. In a recent *New Yorker* article, a former Russian military officer pointed out that interference in an election could succeed only where “necessary conditions” and an “existing background” were present. In America, that “existing background” was a persistent racism, and the “necessary condition” was a black president. The two related factors hobbled America’s ability to safeguard its electoral system. As late as July 2016, a majority of Republican voters doubted that Barack Obama had been born in the United States, which is to say they did not view him as a legitimate president. Republican politicians acted accordingly, infamously denying his final Supreme Court nominee a hearing and then, fatefully, refusing to work with the administration to defend the country against the Russian attack. Before the election, Obama found no takers among Republicans for a bipartisan response, and Obama himself, underestimating Trump and thus underestimating the power of whiteness, believed the Republican nominee too objectionable to actually win. In this Obama was, tragically, wrong. And so the most powerful country in the world has handed over all its affairs—the prosperity of its entire economy; the security of its 300 million citizens; the purity of its water, the viability of its air, the safety of its food; the future of its vast system of education; the soundness of its national highways, airways, and railways; the apocalyptic potential of its nuclear arsenal—to a carnival

barker who introduced the phrase *grab ’em by the pussy* into the national lexicon. It is as if the white tribe united in demonstration to say, “If a black man can be president, then any white man—no matter how fallen—can be president.” And in that perverse way, the democratic dreams of Jefferson and Jackson were fulfilled.

The American tragedy now being wrought is larger than most imagine and will not end with Trump. In recent times, whiteness as an overt political tactic has been restrained by a kind of cordiality that held that its overt invocation would scare off “moderate” whites. This has proved to be only half true at best. Trump’s legacy will be exposing the patina of decency for what it is and revealing just how much a demagogue can get away with. It does not take much to imagine another politician, wiser in the ways of Washington and better schooled in the methodology of governance—and now liberated from the pretense of antiracist civility—doing a much more effective job than Trump.

It has long been an axiom among certain black writers and thinkers that while whiteness endangers the bodies of black people in the immediate sense, the larger threat is to white people themselves, the shared country, and even the whole world. There is an impulse to blanch at this sort of grandiosity. When W. E. B. Du Bois claims that slavery was “singularly disastrous for modern civilization” or James Baldwin claims that whites “have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white,” the instinct is to cry exaggeration. But there really is no other way to read the presidency of Donald Trump. The first white president in American history is also the most dangerous president—and he is made more dangerous still by the fact that those charged with analyzing him cannot name his essential nature, because they too are implicated in it.

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-identity-liberalism.html>

2 <http://reason.com/archives/2016/12/29/anthony-bourdain>

3 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/hillary-clinton-and-the-populist-revolt>

NEW CALEDONIA

New Caledonia counts down to independence vote

Article by Stefan Armbruster, republished from SBS (Australia).

More than 160 years after the Pacific territory was claimed by the French, Caledonians will take part in an independence referendum.

The results from the weekend's French presidential poll are telling, with the majority of votes cast for candidates who say they will respect the referendum outcome but oppose independence.

New Caledonia is a divided community between the minority pro-independence Kanaks and the majority non-Indigenous people wanting to stay French, with lifestyle unparalleled in the South Pacific islands.

A symbol of reconciliation in Noumea is the Tjibaou Cultural Centre, bearing the tribal name of assassinated Kanak independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou.

"We are an act of reconciliation," said Ashley Vindin, secretary-general of the Tjibaou Cultural Centre.

"The Tjibaou cultural centre was built by the French state to get people of New Caledonia to choose a better way of living in peace."

Jean-Marie Tjibaou was among dozens killed in political violence 30 years ago, and that uprising paved the way for the Matignon and Noumea Accords that underpin next year's independence

referendum.

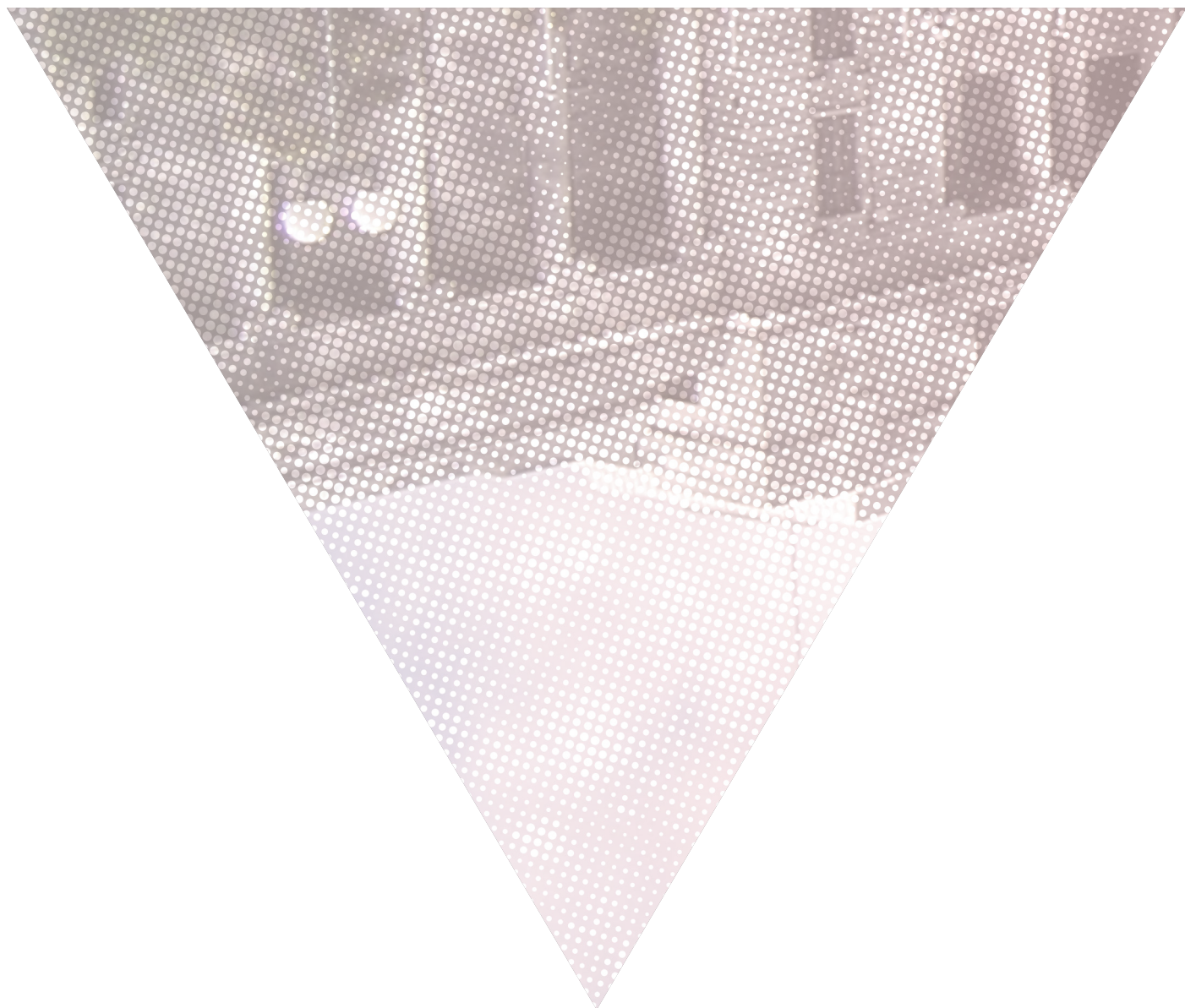
"We were the first people here on this land, New Caledonia, we have been colonised by a European power, France, and right now we are a people without a state," said Roch Wamytan, a long time independence activist, president of the Union Calédonienne-FLNKS and signatory to the Noumea Accord.

The kanaks have lived in New Caledonia for about 3,500 years and, according to the most recent census, form around 40 per cent of the population.

The UN has listed New Caledonia for decolonisation and a team is currently in the country examining preparations for the referendum.

Both remaining contenders for the French presidency, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, say they will respect the referendum process but they oppose independence.

Veteran politician and opponent of independence Philippe Gomès, a current member of the French parliament for his Caledonie Ensemble party, said: "Whatever the president thinks, what's important is what the Caledonian people think, and it's them that will decide the independence of New Caledonia."



This strategic foothold in the Pacific gives France up to a quarter of the world's nickel reserves and a vast ocean territory.

In recent years, mining has slumped and France has been forced to hand out hundreds of millions of euros in government subsidies to New Caledonia.

"For two francs spent here, one franc is brought in by the Caledonians, and one is brought by the state, so if the question is, '[is] the independence economically and financially viable?', the clear answer is 'no'. No question," Mr Gomes said.

Colonialism disposed Kanaks of their lands, their culture, their language, and has left a legacy of economic and social disadvantage.

Under the accords, the French government was supposed to redress that imbalance as part of the independence process, but in thirty years is still well short of the mark.

A century-and-a-half after the French arrived, the kanaks are impatient for change.

"What I'm saying, we've got to do it [independence]," said Mr Wamytan.

"If we hesitate all the time because we're not ready, then we'll never be ready."

Major obstacles remain to be overcome for the referendum, including who is eligible to vote and the exact wording of the question.

The deadline is November 2018.

CATELONIA

Five things to know about the independence movement in Catalonia

By James O’Nions, originally printed by globaljustice.org.uk

This article was first published on October 6th, the week of the Catalan independence referendum. As we go to print the situation has escalated, with the entire Catalan government imprisoned by the Spanish state.

Last year, a group of Global Justice Now activists went to Barcelona to see how movements for food sovereignty, energy democracy and housing rights had created significant infrastructure and fed into the historic win by Barcelona En Comú (Barcelona in Common) in the city council elections the previous year. Having seen those movements first hand, it’s easier to appreciate why what’s happening in Catalonia this week isn’t simply an outbreak of fervent nationalism, but something much more interesting for advocates of social justice.

Here are five dynamics of Catalan independence right now:

1. The Spanish state

Unlike in Portugal, where the fascist dictatorship was overthrown in the Portuguese revolution in 1976, in Spain Francisco Franco’s regime came to a negotiated end after his death in 1975. That means that the new democratic Spain was the result of a compromise between democrats and the alliance of conservatives and fascists that made up Franco’s regime.

Catalonia and other regions such as the Basque Country whose civil rights had been severely repressed (it was basically illegal to speak Catalan or Basque in public) were granted the right to be educated in their language and allowed regional parliaments. Yet at the same time, Spain as a whole was considered ‘indivisible’ and any formal move towards independence outlawed in the constitution.

There was no reform of the police – Franco’s Guardia Civil simply continued, and an official policy of forgetting was put in place in relation to the many thousands of people killed and disappeared by the regime. Not only were there no prosecutions, but neither was there a ‘truth and reconciliation’ process such as the one used when Apartheid ended in South Africa.

Franco’s henchmen reconstituted themselves into the new conservative party, the Partido Popular (People’s Party) which has alternated in power with the social democrats ever since, and which is in government now.

2. Independence on left and right

Unlike in Scotland where the SNP is clearly the dominant party of independence (even if the Greens offer a pro-independence alternative), Catalan pro-independence parties span from centre right to far left. At the last regional elections in 2015, the centre-right Democratic Convergence and centre-left Republican Left ran on a joint ticket together with some more minor parties. The aim was a one-off attempt to get a clear majority for independence in the Catalan parliament. Although Junts pel Sí¹ failed to get a majority, the anti-capitalist independence party, the CUP², which ran separately, also won 10 seats. Together they have a majority, and after some hard negotiation agreed a roadmap to independence.

Nationally and in Catalonia the conservatives (PP) and social democrats (PSOE) are firmly against independence, while Podemos is against independence but for the right to decide and has been vocally against the repression meted out by police.

One of the main arguments against independence on the Spanish left has been that it is based on separatism for one of Spain's wealthiest regions which doesn't want to see its wealth redistributed to poorer areas. But the CUP's Lluc Salellas³ argues that although 'Spain robs us' was once a more dominant slogan, now the discussion is about democratic and civil rights. He adds that "the CUP has said for a number of years that an independent Catalonia should pay money to poorer parts of Spain in the transition. It doesn't have to be a short time, it could be twenty or thirty years ... We are internationalists and we are in solidarity with workers and the poor in Spain."

3. Nationalism vs independence

There is undoubtedly a strand of the Catalan independence movement which looks a lot like any kind of nationalism, downplaying the differences of interest between ordinary people and the elite within Catalonia, while implicitly or explicitly excluding outsiders. For an older generation of workers⁴, many of whom have come from other parts of Spain, Catalan nationalism is a distraction from class inequality. On the other hand, modern Catalan nationalism was born mainly in response

to the oppression of Catalans by Spanish fascism, and as such its dynamic is at least a demand for freedom, not for domination over others.

Even though Catalans now have many of those freedoms, casual anti-Catalan sentiment is still evident in much of Spain. One Catalan woman reports an overheard conversation⁵ in Madrid on referendum day, as the Spanish police were attacking people: "These Catalan people just need a couple of slaps to learn they have to stay." The behaviour of police in the videos from the day of the vote suggests not servants of the law following orders, but bully boys chosen precisely for the contempt they already had for the people they were beating and throwing around.

But if a macho Spanish nationalism is the bigger evil here, is the independence movement merely trying to fight fire with fire? Just as in Scotland where radical independence campaigners said "Britain is for the rich, Scotland can be ours", there seems to be evidence of a new mood in Catalonia whereby independence is a necessary step towards a truly democratic and egalitarian society. Lluc Salellas again: "The last fifteen laws we have passed in the Catalan parliament have been banned by the Spanish state. But these are not independentist laws — many of them are social laws: for example, a law about sanctuary for those fleeing persecution, a law banning energy companies from turning off people's electricity, and a law for a higher minimum wage."

Of course, that won't be everyone's view, but with popular Committees in Defence of the Referendum⁶ having formed and a widely observed general strike against the repression of the movement, the momentum is with the progressive radicals and socialists at the moment. In other words, events around the referendum have pushed independence organising even further away from a nation-building project and towards being a popular democratic revolt.

4. Participatory democracy

Paul Mason writes of his experience in Barcelona on the day of the referendum⁶:

“People stood in the rain and talked in small groups – without hand gestures or raised voices – about what to do. This street-space ... was alive with democratic argument.”

He argues that a form of true democratic participation is emerging in Catalonia which extends far beyond the idea of replacing a Spanish parliamentary democracy with a Catalan one.

Of course this emergent participatory democracy hasn't come out of nowhere. Barcelona is governed by mayor Ada Colau and her Barcelona En Comú coalition which has made democratic participation in the decisions of the municipal government a key policy. This has happened both online and through regular neighbourhood meetings. This revolution in local government has also started to impact on other municipalities across Catalonia. (Colau herself has called on Rajoy to resign⁷ because of the police violence, and although she cast a blank ballot in the referendum, defends the right of Catalans to vote on independence.)

From the 'indignados' movement (called 15M in Spain) which took over public spaces across the whole country in 2011 to other initiatives such as that around a people's 'Constituent Process' across Catalonia, the sense of politics being everyone's business and something there should be no barriers to involvement in has been building for some time now. That's one reason that the independence movement has a different character from how it looked a decade ago. In a sense it is part of the revolt against neoliberalism that is happening right across Europe.

5. Catalonia and the European Union

Strangely in Britain, The Daily Express has been among the most vocal in condemning the European Union for not speaking out against the repression during the referendum. Since the Express isn't known for its principled defence of the civil rights of foreigners, we can only assume it has its own reasons for attacking the EU. But in any case the European Union is not really a single political actor anyway, but a club of states which tend to act out of self-interest. Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy is a key ally of conservative German chancellor Angela Merkel, and other powerful states have their own regional independence sentiment which they don't want to encourage.

In fact the Belgian prime minister did condemn Rajoy's repression, and there was condemnation from the European parliament too. But real power in the EU currently lies with states who are committed to a neoliberal consensus which they are hoping events in Catalonia don't disrupt. Yet the EU's set up in some ways makes Catalan independence feel more possible, with open borders between many member states and common institutions making sovereignty potentially more fluid. This other dimension of the EU stands in contrast to the realpolitik of the club of states who make up the Union.

The modern Catalan independence movement, then, reflects a struggle between competing versions of a future Europe – either a technocrat's Europe operating in the interests of finance and the 1%, or an internationalist Europe of democratic self-determination. If it can help constitute the latter, Catalan independence could make a difference to our future too.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junts_pel_Sí

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_Unity_Candidacy

3 <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/10/catalonia-referendum-spain-catalan-independence>

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/30/red-belt-catalonia-labour-movement-referendum>

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/03/catalan-spanish-european-mariano-rajoy-memories-civil-war>

6 <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/committees-in-defence-of-the-referendum-update-from-catalonia/>

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x96ka7ros0>



About Fightback + Core Program

Fightback is a socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. White-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

We recognise that capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa / New Zealand through colonisation. While we draw substantially on European whakapapa and intellectual traditions, we seek to break the unity of the European colonial project, in favour of collective self-determination and partnership between tangata whenua and tau iwi. We recognise that this must be a learning process.

Fightback is a place to stand for those seeking to dismantle all oppression and exploitation. While we draw inspiration and lessons from history, theoretical agreement on past revolutions is not the basis for our unity. Rather, we unify around a common programme for transformation here and now.

As individuals we are involved in trade unions, feminist organising, anti-war action, and various forms of work. As a collective, Fightback develops propaganda that seeks to link this wider work with a socialist programme.

10-Point Program

Fightback stands for the following core program, and for building institutions of grass-roots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

- 1. Constitutional transformation** based on Tino Rangatiratanga, Mana Motuhake and workers power. Tangata whenua and community co-ops to operate as kaitiaki over public resources.
- 2. Secure, appropriate and meaningful work** for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be replaced with a Universal Basic Income.
- 3. International working class solidarity.** Open borders, full rights for migrant workers. Recognition of Pasefika rights to self-determination. Opposition to all imperialist intervention and alliances, including New Zealand state's participation in military occupations, 'free trade' agreements and surveillance agreements.
- 4. No revolution without women's liberation.** Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
- 5. An ecosocialist solution** to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
- 6. Freedom of information.** End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.

7. Abolish prisons, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.

8. Universal right to housing. Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.

9. Fully-funded healthcare at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to “top-down” efforts to change working people’s behaviour.

10. Fully-funded education at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining kaupapa Maori approaches.

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